

ROUNDS 17 & 18 PRACTICE AND QUALIFYING

Weather: sunny, with a dry track.

PRACTICE 1 – BEST LAP FOR JÖRG MÜLLER

Jörg Müller set the pace in the first free practice session, as he clocked a fastest lap of 1:43.274. The time was set on his third lap and none of the drivers could better it. Behind Jörg's BMW was Gabriele Tarquini in his Alfa Romeo, 0.148 of a second slower, then Jordi Gené and Peter Terting in their SEAT León cars. Augusto Farfus completed the top 5 drivers.

The fastest 13 times were all within 0.7 seconds of each other with Alain Menu occupying 13th spot which made him the fastest of the Chevrolet drivers. Thomas Klenke looked like he was going to finish among the top ten times until James Thompson posted a 1:43.874, demoting the Ford man to 11th by just 0.066 of a second. Young Spaniard Marc Carol achieved an encouraging 14th quickest time in his first outing in the FIA WTCC for SEAT Sport, while Polo Villaamil is at the bottom of the times as he adjusts to touring cars. His GR Asia team-mate Tom Coronel however, was by far the quickest Independent competitor and 9th overall.

PRACTICE 2 – ALFA, FORD AND SEAT ON TOP

The fastest time in the second practice was posted by Fabrizio Giovanardi who completed a lap in 1:45.162 in his Alfa Romeo 156. However, it was Michael Funke's name at the top of the timesheet for the first half of the session. The German set a time of 1:44.690 in his Ford Focus on the third lap before stopping seconds later and being towed away. Despite this early departure due to an engine failure; Funke's time was good enough to remain 2nd quickest.

SEAT continued to do well as Jordi Gené and Rickard Rydell were 3rd and 4th fastest respectively; their times just 0.007 apart, while the third León driven by Peter Terting was 6th. The SEAT Sport men were split by Chevrolet's Nicola Larini who had the 5th best time, 0.507 off the best pace. The best BMW car was 10th overall, driven by Jörg Müller.

In the Independents category, Tom Coronel dominated again clocking, the 9th fastest time overall.

QUALIFYING – POLE FOR GENÉ IN THE NEW LEÓN

In a riveting qualifying session SEAT came out on top and Jordi Gené will start on pole tomorrow, joined by his team-mate Peter Terting on the front row. Gené was the only driver to set a time below 1 minute 43 seconds – 1:42.778, meaning a Spanish driver in a Spanish car on pole in the WTCC Race of Spain, and also the first pole position for the new SEAT León on its only third appearance.

Dirk Müller completed the top three who all set their best times in the final seconds.



SEAT Sport began their attack nine minutes into the session as Gené, Rydell and Terting jumped to 1st-2nd-3rd. The three then returned to the pits and waited to see if a challenge was mounted. It did indeed come, in the form of Farfus' Alfa Romeo as he split the SEAT trio by slotting into 3rd place with a lap of 1:43.361. Ten minutes later, Rydell and Terting were back on the track with the young German right on the tail of his team-mate to benefit from a slip-stream. The team tactics worked as Terting improved his time and returned to 3rd position. However, the action was by no means over as Rob Huff of Chevrolet shot to 6th place and then the lap later he set a fantastic 1:43.295, promoting himself to 2nd. He couldn't hold on to that spot though as Gené and Terting worked together to reduce their times even further. They secured a SEAT 1-2 and Dirk Müller also stormed through on his final lap to set a 3rd fastest 1:43.277. This demoted Huff to 4th - still Chevrolet's best qualifying position so far. Rickard Rydell will be on row three with Farfus next to him in 6th. The Brazilian youngster emerged as the fastest of the Alfa Romeo men who were all fighting against understeer. Ford were unable to be as competitive as they were in the practice sessions as Klenke and Funke set the 18th and 20th quickest times.

The battle to be the fastest independent driver was also closely fought as at one point, Rosenblad, Coronel, De Micheli and Engström's times were within an incredibly tight 0.314 of a second. Eventually it was Coronel of GR Asia who prevailed and posted the 11th fastest time overall. However, due to an engine change after Istanbul, he will begin 21st after being penalised 10 grid positions. This means JAS Motorsport man, De Micheli in 16th will head the Independent field with Rosenblad in the spot right behind.

ROUNDS 17 & 18 QUALIFYING QUOTES

Jordi GENÉ, SEAT Sport – fastest

“I must be the happiest man in Spain. I couldn’t have asked for anything else, today at least. Tomorrow is a new challenge. The team adopted some very good tactics and we knew that the track is demanding on the chassis so it was all or nothing. I took a lot of risks on both my fastest laps but it ended up perfect, especially thanks to Peter (Terting) pulling me up the straights. To be honest I am little bit surprised that the León is going so well straight away. However, we had no summer holidays and everyone worked hard so we deserve it. Here the straights are not very long so we knew it was our chance and we had to capitalise on it which we clearly have done. As for tomorrow, I am never happy to have a BMW close to me at the start because they get away quickly. I hope for a good, clean start and then to stay in front and be consistent. I will be giving 110% to achieve the win.”

Peter TERTING, SEAT Sport – 2nd fastest

“It’s the first time I have qualified and will start on the front row of the grid and this is great achievement for me. I am pleased that in my first year in this championship I am showing people that I am quick. The León works well and considering I have not done a lot of testing I am really happy. For me and my engineer this morning was difficult because we had to learn a lot about the car and the changes we need to make. There were steps forward and backwards but in the end we went the right way for qualifying.”

Dirk MÜLLER, BMW Team Deutschland – 3rd fastest

“To be honest I wasn’t really focused on qualifying so high. My target was 7th or 8th so I am really happy with 3rd. The handling of my car is quite good which is encouraging for tomorrow and I have a few changes in mind which should help. In terms of the Championship, yes I will be concentrating on scoring points because each one is important, but I will also be fighting for the win, I have to. My main competitors for the Championship are not too close behind me but you never know what will be the outcome of the reverse grid. Expect some close racing tomorrow.”

Robert HUFF, Chevrolet Racing – 4th fastest

“It would have been fantastic to start from the front row but 4th position is still a dream come true for the team. It’s really what we needed and thanks to everyone who has put in the hard work to make it happen, it has all come together. I am confident with the car so I think I could be fighting for the podium positions. I can attack on this circuit and push hard so fingers crossed it will be Chevrolet’s first podium this weekend.”



Augusto FARFUS, Alfa Romeo Racing Team – 6th fastest

“We have found a track which is totally different from last year, with new kerbs and run-off greens with artificial grass. Conditions change continuously and this has put us in trouble. However I’m confident for tomorrow. We have to work on the set-up and focus on recovering positions in the first race.”

Tom CORONEL, GR Asia – 11th fastest

“After Istanbul we changed from the 20 valve to the new 16 valve engine which doesn’t affect power but does make a difference in pick-up so I can feel the difference. Qualifying was good, I made a little mistake in the first corner but I am really happy. Here if you are off the line you have no grip and so it’s difficult to overtake. This means I won’t be able to work through the field and challenge the works drivers but I will have to wait and see if people make some mistakes tomorrow.”

Andy PRIAULX, BMW Team UK – 15th fastest

“There are a number of things that have built up and I’m not comfortable and confident with the balance of the car which means I can’t get the best out of my driving. I did make a mistake in qualifying which probably cost me five positions. It’s now a question of finding the balance for tomorrow and we’ll see what can happen. I was worried about the championship title before this weekend and obviously I have not given myself the best chance here but anything can happen and it usually does in motorsport. There is no way I am giving up tomorrow and I will fight hard.”